

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Selective Japanese Justice for Family Fed - Special Law against our faith

Knut Holdhus  
January 2, 2026



Seishiro Sugihara, former professor at Musashino Women's University and expert on issues of freedom of religion and constitutional law



### Unequal treatment under the law: Scholar points out the selective justice and legal flaws in Japan's liquidation guidelines

Tokyo, 30th December 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

[Interview Feature] The Dark Side of the "Special Measures Law" Targeting the Family Federation (Part 2)

Legislation That Runs Counter to the Principles of the Rule of Law

Part 2 of interview with Seishiro Sugihara, former professor at Musashino Women's University and expert on issues of freedom of religion and constitutional law

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

See [part 1](#) of the interview: [Expert: "Is Dissolution Framework Constitutional?"](#)



– What is your view on the purpose and intent of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) "Guidelines on the Liquidation of Designated Religious Corporations" (the "Guidelines"), which appear to have the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) specifically in mind?

In the section of the Guidelines titled "Responses Such as Compensation to Victims", it states:

"The liquidator shall respond sincerely to victims so that not a single victim is left behind, including victims who reported damages within the creditor claim period and those known to the liquidator, as well as victims who reported damages after the expiration of the creditor claim period..."

At first glance, this may appear reasonable. However, in effect, it demands an almost limitless commitment to victim relief exclusively in the case of the [Family Federation](#). This is neither fair nor equitable when compared with victims who may have suffered harm involving other religious corporations.

– The Guidelines also include language under "Measures to Encourage the Reporting of Harm," such as: "Inquiring of a certain range of counterparties identified from records substantiating donations held by the liquidating corporation as to whether they intend to report harm," and "Based on a comparison between those who donated disproportionately large sums and the number

of reported victims, it can be objectively assumed that a considerable number of potential victims exist." These passages seem to presume that high-value donors are potential victims.



*A Japanese woman offering a donation at a meeting.  
Illustration*

In principle, when money or property is donated to a religious corporation based on faith, the donor cannot later demand its return simply because they have lost that faith. The sole exception is when the religious corporation has committed an unlawful act – but even then, such unlawfulness must be legally established through an open judicial process.

For a liquidator to arbitrarily determine that a donation was "disproportionately large", or to define a "certain range" of individuals as victims based on the [organization](#)'s donation records, is an outrageous act that ignores the very essence of freedom of religion.

**– What do you see as the root cause of these problems inherent in the Guidelines?**

The root lies in the law enacted exactly two months after 13th October 2023, when the Minister of Education requested the Tokyo District Court to issue a dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#). That law is formally titled: "The Act on Special Provisions for the Operations of the Japan Legal Support Center to Facilitate the Prompt and Smooth Relief of Victims of Specific Illegal Acts, and Special Provisions on the Disposal and Management of Assets by Religious Corporations" (the "Special Measures Law").

This law was enacted to monitor the movement of the [Family Federation](#)'s assets in the event that unlawful acts are established, and damages must be paid. To that extent, there was some rationale for its enactment. However, at its core, the law privileges only victims associated with the [Family Federation](#).

Moreover, Article 5 of the Supplementary Provisions states:

"This Act shall lose its effect on the day three years have elapsed from the date of its enforcement."

This means that, in practical terms, the law targets only the [Family Federation](#).



Under the principles of the rule of law, special legislation limited to a specific subject is permissible when it confers benefits upon that subject. However, legislation that imposes disadvantages on a specific target is not permitted. A special law that singles out only one religious corporation for disadvantage must never be enacted under the banner of the rule of law, legal governance, or a law-based state.

Accordingly, this law must be abolished. The fact that the House of Representatives Legislative Bureau, the House of Councillors Legislative Bureau, and the Diet itself allowed such legislation to be enacted is something that defies ordinary legal common sense.

**– This law was introduced as a members' bill.**

The bill was submitted by six lawmakers: three from the Liberal Democratic Party, two from Komeito, and one from the Democratic Party for the People. That members of Komeito were among the sponsors is nothing short of outrageous.

If Pobanzone were to look back far enough, Soka Gakkai [See editor's note 1 below] – the religious organization that forms the foundation of Komeito – would undoubtedly have its own share of scandals. There would also be countless individuals who could claim to have suffered harm in the past. How, then, can a political party backed by Soka Gakkai become a sponsor of a law that, for a limited time, targets only other religious corporations?

If the intention is merely to save oneself while others are sacrificed, then this behavior is even more reprehensible than Kandata in Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's "The Spider's Thread." [See editor's note 2 below]

See [part 1](#) of the interview: [Expert: "Is Dissolution Framework Constitutional?"](#)



*The Soka Gakkai International flag*



*The head office of Soka Gakkai, at Shinanomachi, Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan 2006*

*To actualize*



*The front cover page of a [Japanese version](#) of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's "The Spider's Thread" - Published in 1979*

[Editor's note 1: Soka Gakkai, a global lay Buddhist organization originating in Japan, aims to create an "ideal world" based on the principles of Nichiren Buddhism, which emphasizes individual empowerment, inner transformation, and societal harmony. Their vision is often framed as kosen-rufu, meaning the widespread propagation of Buddhist values to establish peace and happiness for all.

Soka Gakkai promotes peace, culture, and education through initiatives that focus on personal transformation (human revolution) - the belief that changing oneself positively impacts society; peace activism - anti-nuclear campaigns, human rights advocacy, and interfaith dialogue; education - institutions like Soka University emphasize value creation and global citizenship; community engagement - social welfare programs, disaster relief, and environmental sustainability efforts.

These ideals in governance, Soka Gakkai founded the Komeito party in 1964 (now known as New Komeito or simply Komeito). The party's purpose was to translate Buddhist-based humanistic values into public policy. While legally separate from Soka Gakkai, Komeito has long been backed by members of Soka Gakkai and focuses on peace-oriented diplomacy (e.g., supporting Japan's pacifist constitution); social welfare policies (benefiting education, healthcare, and the elderly); grassroots democracy (reflecting the voice of ordinary citizens)

Since 1999, Komeito has been a coalition partner with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), influencing policies while maintaining a centrist stance.

Despite its contributions, Soka Gakkai's political role has been controversial, with critics accusing it of blurring the lines between religion and politics. Some also argue that Komeito's alliance with the conservative LDP compromises its original pacifist ideals.

Soka Gakkai envisions an ideal world through personal empowerment, education, and political engagement. While its approach is rooted in Buddhist ethics, its political involvement remains a complex and debated issue.]

**[Editor's note 2:** In Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's short story "The Spider's Thread" (Kumo no Ito), Kandata is the central human figure and a condemned sinner in Buddhist Hell.

Kandata is portrayed as a notorious criminal – a robber and murderer – who suffers torment in Hell for his many crimes. However, during his life he once performed a single act of compassion: he spared a spider instead of killing it. This small deed is remembered by the Buddha.

Moved by this lone good act, the Buddha lowers a spider's thread into Hell, giving Kandata an opportunity to climb out and attain salvation. Kandata begins to ascend successfully, but when he notices other sinners climbing up the same thread behind him, he

becomes selfish and possessive, shouting for them to get off. At that moment, the thread snaps, and Kandata falls back into Hell.]

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## State Failure And Non-State Peace Projects

- January 1, 2026
- Knut Holdhus



State failure to fulfil its political responsibility creates vacuum leaving long-term peacebuilding to others through backdoor politics

### 세계일보

The logo of the *Segye Ilbo*

On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025, the Korean daily *Segye Ilbo* issued an opinion piece which in English would be headlined "The Unification Church's Peace Project – Wasn't This the State's Job?" It was written by Moon Yong-dae (문용대), a Korean essayist, literary award recipient, and opinion columnist.

See also [Climate of Suspicion: Peace Reframed as Politics](#)

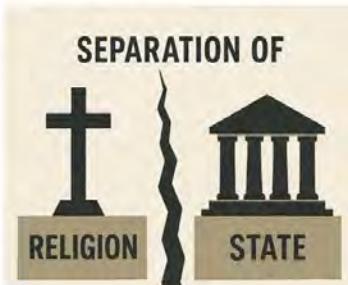
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In many Western democracies, the separation of religion and state is treated as a foundational rule of political life. Religious groups are expected to stay out of policymaking, and governments are expected to remain neutral toward belief systems. This principle exists to protect individual freedom, prevent coercion, and maintain pluralism in diverse societies. From this perspective, any large political or geopolitical project associated with a



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religious organization is often viewed with immediate suspicion.

The Segye Ilbo [opinion piece](#) starts from this widely shared assumption but argues that it is not sufficient, on its own, to explain how ambitious international peace projects actually emerge – or why religious and civil society actors sometimes play outsized roles in proposing them. The article uses the long-debated [Korea-Japan undersea tunnel](#) as a case study to explore this tension.



An illustration of an undersea tunnel between South Korea and Japan. Image: CoPilot Ai, 1st January 2026.

Separation of religion and state.  
Illustration: CoPilot Ai, 1st January 2026

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The [proposed tunnel](#), which would physically connect Japan and the Korean Peninsula, has been controversial for decades. One reason is its enormous technical and financial cost. Another, more politically sensitive reason is its association with the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) – also often called by its former name, the [Unification Church](#). In South Korea and Japan alike, the movement is often portrayed by media as politically active, highly organized, and controversial. As a result, critics have dismissed the [tunnel proposal](#) as an attempt by a [religious organization](#) to expand its influence under the guise of infrastructure or peacebuilding.

The [article](#) does not deny these concerns, but it asks readers to step back and examine the broader context. From the [Family Federation's](#) own perspective, the [tunnel](#) is not merely a transportation project. It is imagined as a symbolic and practical link between island Japan and continental Asia, between maritime and land-based civilizations. More importantly, it is framed as one component of a much larger peace vision that includes international highway networks ("Peace Road"), cross-border peace parks between North and South Korea, and even the idea of hosting a future United Nations office on the Korean Peninsula.

At this point, the author introduces a crucial distinction: proposing a vision is not the same as having the authority to implement it. In modern states, only governments control national budgets, diplomacy, and security policy. Religious groups and civil society organizations can advocate ideas, but they cannot turn them into law or infrastructure on their own. This creates an inherent structural tension. Big ideas about peace and reconciliation may originate outside government, but they can only be realized through political decision-making.

According to [Moon's article](#), this is where things often go wrong. When political systems are unable – or unwilling – to engage seriously with long-term, cross-national challenges, those ideas have no clear institutional pathway. Formal channels such as parliamentary debate, official commissions, or public referenda may move too slowly, be blocked by partisan conflict, or prioritize short-term electoral concerns. As a result, advocates for large, long-range projects sometimes turn to informal influence, private persuasion, or indirect access to decision-makers.

From the outside, such behavior can easily look suspicious. In Western discourse, "backdoor politics" is often equated with corruption or illegitimate lobbying. The [article](#) acknowledges that lobbying for narrow private gain should be firmly rejected. However, it also poses an uncomfortable question: **what happens when even broadly public-minded visions cannot enter the political system through legitimate, transparent means?** In that case, the problem may not lie solely with the actors knocking on the door, but with the [political structure that keeps the door closed](#).

The author argues that debates over church-state separation in Korea have intensified precisely because **governments have failed to take responsibility for long-term regional peace strategies**.

Reconciliation between Korea and Japan, stability in Northeast Asia, and durable peace on the Korean Peninsula are issues that require continuity beyond a single administration. Yet, in practice, few governments have



Mother Han, Hak Ja Han, proposing a [vision for the Korean peninsula](#). Screenshot from transmission by Peacelink TV.



Part of the [peace vision](#): Korean reunification. Illustration:

pursued these goals consistently. **When the state retreats from this role, non-state actors – religious groups included – step into the vacuum.**

From this angle, the [Family Federation](#)'s peace initiatives are less evidence of religious overreach than of governmental absence. Regardless of how one judges the movement itself, the [article](#) suggests that it was at least willing to sustain long-term visions that the state repeatedly postponed or abandoned. Once those visions began to intersect with real political possibilities, engagement with politicians became unavoidable.

The danger, the author warns, is oversimplification. **If all such engagement is dismissed as a violation of secular principles, the core issue – peace and long-term regional cooperation – gets lost. Religion becomes permanently suspect, while politicians avoid accountability by pointing to church-state boundaries rather than making difficult decisions.** This leads to a cycle of mistrust and inaction.

The [article](#) concludes by returning the responsibility to politics. Projects like the [Korea-Japan undersea tunnel](#) should absolutely be debated, criticized, and scrutinized. But before rejecting them outright, society should ask why such ambitious peace proposals so often originate outside the state. Ultimately, **the author calls for political leadership capable of translating moral or religious visions into the secular language of public interest, national benefit, and long-term value.** True peace, the [opinion](#) piece argues, begins when governments are willing to reclaim that role – **so that big ideas no longer have to enter politics through the backdoor** at all.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

**Featured image** above: Illustration of undersea tunnel between South Korea and Japan. Image: Chat GPT, 1st January 2026.

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